PART 3 - THE TRIBULATION. - CHAPTER 1: EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE TRIBULATION.

END-TIME PROPHECY Part 3 - The Tribulation

CHAPTER 1: EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE TRIBULATION
We have seen the order of prophetic events:
1. The Church Age ends with the Rapture.
2. The 7-Year Tribulation (the second half is the Great Tribulation).
3. The Second Coming of Christ brings the Tribulation to an end.

We now consider some events that must lead into the Tribulation.

* WORLD-WIDE EVANGELISM
The Rapture is harvest time for the Church Dispensation. Before the harvest there were rains called the latter rain, which helped to bring the crops to fullness. This implies there will be an outpouring of the latter rain of the Spirit, to bring the Church to fullness before the Harvest. So in the last days of the Church we expect to see an outpouring of the Spirit for the sake of the harvest.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:7,8).
James tells us to follow Elijah's example to pray for this rain which is a necessary part of God's witness to the nations that He is real: Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit (v17,18)
The rain, along with evangelism, is necessary to bring forth the fruit of the earth (saved souls - as confirmed in v19,20). If we look at the Church world-wide over the last 100 years we can see that we are in the time of the latter-rains and we should expect an increase of evangelism and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the remaining time before the Rapture.

This harvest (called 'the fullness of the Gentiles' in Romans 11:25) must include those from every tribe and tongue and nation: Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:8-10). We have seen that this is the song of the raptured Church in Heaven, just before the Tribulation starts. This requires world-wide evangelism. The Gospel must reach every people-group. Only recently is this goal close to being reached through the world missions-movement and the translation of the Bible into every language! Jesus (talking about the Church-Age) confirmed this: the gospel must first be preached to all the nations (Mark 13:10). Don't confuse this with: this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, then the end will come (Matthew24:14) which speaks of world-wide evangelism in the Tribulation (from the context), leading to another Harvest at the end.

* The Re-establishment of the Nation of Israel (1948)
As well as predicting the captivity of Israel to Assyria (722BC) and Babylon (606-536BC) because of terrible idolatry (Deut 28:49), the prophets also predicted another dispersion - this time world-wide, that would happen after they had returned to the land. Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other (Deut 28:64, also 4:26,27). v65-68 describes the trouble and anxiety they would face as they were scattered.

This was confirmed by Jesus: They will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations.
And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles (Luke 21:24). This was fulfilled in AD 70.
So this time Israel was not just in captivity for 70 years in one nation but for 2000 years dispersed to all the nations of the world! The first captivity was due to idolatry from which they repented, so what sin could be so bad to bring about such a punishment (far worse than idolatry)? There is only one possibility - the rejection of her Messiah - Jesus!

In Deuteronomy 29:22-29 Moses warned Israel that if they sinned, God would remove them from the land and

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disperse them. Then in Deut 30:3-5, he predicted that they will be regathered from all the nations: The LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. (Deuteronomy 30:1-10 will only be completely fulfilled at the Return of Christ after Israel's repentance but we are seeing the beginnings of its fulfilment in our time). Such a world-wide regathering could only take place after AD 70 following the world-wide dispersion that began that year.

Leviticus 26 describes the Five Cycles of Discipline God would apply to Israel if she sinned. The fourth Cycle was enemy occupation, but if they continued to sin they would move into the fifth Cycle which was expulsion from the land (Leviticus 26:27-39). This happened first in 606-536BC with the captivity in Babylon. However, the prophecy also indicates that there will be another dispersion, this time not to just one nation but to all the nations (v33,38). This was fulfilled in AD 70. However, again Israel is told that God will regather her, even from every nation (v40-46).

The Old Testament prophets predicted the return of Israel to their own land from a world-wide captivity. This would be require one of the greatest miracles of all time! Moreover, this dispersion and regathering was predicted by Jesus: they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles UNTIL the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24). The UNTIL indicates that the dispersion will only last for a definite period of time (called 'the Times of the Gentiles') after which Israel will come back to the land and regain control of Jerusalem. The Times of the Gentiles are therefore now over (with the exception of the seven years of the Tribulation yet to run). A consideration of Daniel's prophecy of Gentile Dominion over Israel leads some to the conclusion that the Times of the Gentiles refer to a period of 2520 years of Gentile domination that began with the Babylonian Captivity and ended over the period 1914-1933 AD. Thus, from 1933 we saw the build up to World-War 2, the War itself including the Holocaust out of which the nation of Israel was miraculously reborn in 1948, followed by the recapture of Jerusalem in 1967. Therefore we have seen Jesus' prophecy come to pass!

In fact, ISRAEL must be back in the land before the start of the Tribulation because the prophecies of this time all assume that Israel is in the land and in control of Jerusalem (e.g. Matthew 24, Daniel 9:26, Zechariah 12-14, Ezekiel 38,39, Rev 7-19). The stage must be set before the final scene begins. Bible Prophecy of the nations is all centred on Israel and the land, so we should expect this miraculous event to be a major end-time sign. Bible believers in the 18th and 19th centuries (such as Grattan Guiness) were able to predict the regathering of Israel to the Land even when it looked impossible!

Indeed Jesus gave Israel as the main SIGN by which we would know that we were in the final generation (the time just before the Tribulation) in Luke 21:29-32: Learn the parable of the FIG TREE (ISRAEL). When its branch has already become tender and begins to put forth leaves, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.

In Jeremiah 24, Israel and Judah in captivity are described as FIGS.
Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah, whom I have sent out of this place for their own good, into the land of the Chaldeans (v5). They are no longer a Fig-Tree (a nation) planted in the land, but are scattered as a collection of individual figs.

The Rebirth of Israel (1948) is a clear sign that we are in the last days. The whole world has crossed over the threshold of the end times. We are in the time of the fulfilment of the prophetic word. We need to understand what is happening. The present regathering of Israel from every nation is a prophesied work of God, signalling the end of the Time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) and the approach of the Kingdom being restored to Israel (Acts1:6,7).

The prophets spoke of two international returns:

The first regathering is in unbelief, in preparation for the Tribulation through which God will bring Israel to repentance and faith. This is a partial regathering. He will bring her back to the land where He will deal with her spiritually. This regathering started in the last century and is taking place now (the Fig Tree puts forth leaves) as a major fulfilment of prophecy.

The second regathering is described in Isaiah 11:11-12: It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. This regathering in faith is called the second international regathering. Therefore there must be a first international regathering.

The first regathering is before the Tribulation: Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they are all bronze, tin, iron, and lead, in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt it; so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you. Yes, I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst (the Tribulation). As silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My fury on you (Ezekiel 22:17-22).

Zephaniah 2:1-3 shows that the regathering in unbelief happens before the Tribulation (the Day of the Lord in 1:14-18) : Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable (unbelieving) nation (Israel), before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff (blowing the wicked away), before the LORD'S fierce anger comes upon you, before the Day of the LORD'S anger comes upon you (the Tribulation)! Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the

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Day of the LORD'S anger (a hint of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture).

Daniel 9:27 shows the Tribulation beginning with the Jewish leaders making a covenant with the antichrist, requiring a Jewish state in unbelief before the Tribulation. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

Zechariah 12-14 also shows Israel in the land at the end-times just before the Return of Christ, where they realise that Jesus is their Messiah (12:10), receive cleansing from sin (13:1) and where Jesus returns to save them from their enemies (14:1-5).

Ezekiel 36:22-32 makes it clear that there is a regathering before they are cleansed from sin and regenerated. The physical restoration is a prelude to her spiritual restoration: Say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them (Israel enters the new covenant at the start of the Millennium).

Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.
I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it,
and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields,
so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.
The regathering to the land is a step towards spiritual restoration:
Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good;
and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations.
The regathering is not a response to their repentance because they are still in sin (the national rejection of Messiah)
but it is because God is fulfilling His covenant promise:
Not for your sake do I do this, says the Lord, let it be known to you.
Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 describes the restoration of Israel. It gives the same sequence:
Firstly, a regathering of the scattered dead bones of Israel (in unbelief).
Secondly, a spiritual regeneration once the bodies had been fully restored.
The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, Son of man, can these bones live?
So I answered, O Lord GOD, You know. Again He said to me, Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live (the same as in the creation of Adam). Then you shall know that I am the LORD.

(1) So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.

(2) Also He said to me, Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath,
Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.
So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off! Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it, says the LORD.

First, Israel will be resurrected as a nation. This will be a first step toward their spiritual restoration when they will permanently settled in the land in the Millennium. At the present time we are in the stage of the bones coming together.
This regathering will only be completed at the Second Coming of Christ.

Jeremiah 30:3-11. The First Regathering: For behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah, says the LORD. And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

The Tribulation: These are the words that the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah. For thus says the LORD: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labour with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labour, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that Day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he (JACOB=ISRAEL) shall be saved out of it.

The Return of Christ. For it shall come to pass in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them.

The Kingdom: But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up (resurrect) for them.

The final regathering of the remnant. Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob, says the LORD, Nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you, says the LORD, to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished.

Ezekiel 38:8-12 describes an invasion from the North upon a regathered Israel before the Second Coming and before her national conversion. In the latter years you (Russia) will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you....to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.
In fact, because of Divine intervention in this war many in the nations will turn to God. Sometime after this war God completes the regathering and spiritual restoration of Israel (Ezekiel 39:21-29) for life in the Millennium (Ezekiel 40-48).

The second World-Wide Regathering in faith (at Christ's Return). All of believing Israel will be regathered to the Land to live there in the Millennium. First the nation will enter into the New Covenant with God (the Fig Tree puts forth fruit): He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect (Israel) from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:31). So the first regathering is in preparation for the discipline of the Tribulation and the second is in preparation for the blessings of the Millennium.

See Part 4 for the many Scriptures about this Regathering.

Some prophecies will only be completely fulfilled with this second regathering to the land but the first regathering is clearly included within their scope: Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, Give them up! And to the south, Do not keep them back! Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth. Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him (Isaiah 43:5-7). Such a world-wide gathering could only take place after AD 70 when the world-wide dispersion took place. God starts to bring forth this miracle by commanding the reluctant nations. He brings Israel to the Land to prepare them to be His glory in the Millennium.

The Second Exodus in Jeremiah.
Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that they shall no longer say,
As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, but,
As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel
from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.
And they shall dwell in their own land (Jeremiah 23:7,8).

Therefore behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that it shall no more be said,
The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, but,
The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where
He had driven them. For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers (Jeremiah 16:14-17).

For thus says the LORD: Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations.
Proclaim, give praise, and say, O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel! Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labours with child, together; a great throng shall return there. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn (Jeremiah 31:7-9).

Daniel 9 also predicts the reestablishment of Israel before the Tribulation. Because Daniel knew from Jeremiah (25:11-12) that the 70 years in Babylon was soon to be over, Daniel prayed for Israel's full restoration. In response to Daniel's prayer for Israel's forgiveness of sin and restoration of Israel and her Temple (v20), God revealed His programme and timing in the prophecy of the 70 Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27). There was a short-term fulfillment of v24, for in 490 days Cyrus invaded Babylon and the Jews were free to return. The long-term fulfillment would be in 490 years (v24-27). The Kingdom of God would be established after a period of 490 years from a decree to rebuild Jerusalem (458 BC). This takes us to 33 AD. But the Jewish rejection of the Messiah and His Kingdom brought a complication - the insertion of a Mystery Church period of 2000 years. The Jewish clock would be stopped and the last seven years were cancelled to be rerun at the end of the age as the Tribulation. The consequence of that generation's rejection of Christ is in v26 - Jerusalem's destruction of by 'the people of the prince who is to come'. We now know that this was fulfilled by the Romans in 66-73 AD, and so in v27, the 'prince who is to come' (the antichrist) must be the head of a revived Roman Empire. Verse 27 describes antichrist's activity during the Tribulation, the final 7 years of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks, at the end of which the full restoration of Israel would happen with the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus in Matthew 24 quotes from this prophecy in describing the Great Tribulation. Now v26 sees Israel defeated and dispersed by the Romans (AD 70) as a result of her rejection of Messiah. But v27 requires her to be back in the Land again as a nation before the Tribulation (as she was in the original 7 years of AD 26-33), for early in the Tribulation antichrist makes a covenant with Israel which enables her to worship in the Temple. Therefore we see that there must be an initial partial regathering of Israel before the Tribulation, so that through the Tribulation God will deal with Israel, and by the end of the Tribulation she will come to faith in her Messiah and call upon Him for salvation. The Christ personally, at His Coming, will complete her regathering to the Land from all nations.

* Jerusalem under Jewish control (1967).
Bible prophecy declares that full control of Jerusalem must be restored to Israel (Luke 21:24). In the Tribulation there will be a rebuilt and functioning Jewish Temple which antichrist will capture and desecrate half-way through the Tribulation. This requires prior Jewish control of the Temple area and therefore of Jerusalem so that it can be built. This happened in 1967 thus setting the stage for the fulfilment of this prophecy. Jesus said: Jerusalem.. is

the city of the great King (Psalm 48:2; Matthew5:35). God's King will rule over the world from Jerusalem, which is why there is such a spiritual battle over Jerusalem, why the antichrist wants it and why it is central to Armageddon.

* The Invasion of Israel from the North (Ezekiel 38,39).
These chapters (placed after the regathering of Israel to her land and before the Millennium - chapters 40-48) describe a massive invasion of Israel from the North and the destruction of the invaders by God. Some identify this as Armageddon, others as the battle in Revelation 20 after the Millennium; others place it at Mid-Tribulation. However, there are good reasons to place it before the Tribulation.

WHO ARE THE INVADERS? (Ezekiel 38:1-6):
Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,
Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog,
the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops: many people are with you.
God is sovereignly bringing this about to judge these nations because of their anti-God and anti-Israel positions.

Gog originally meant mountain, then later a strong ruler.
Magog = the land and people of Gog.
The prince of Rosh, in some translations is The chief prince (v2).

Magog (Scythians), Rosh, Meshech (Mushcovites) and Tubal are all known ancient tribes that settled in modern day Russia (according to Genesis 10, Herodotus, Josephus, and Pliny). Gesenius says that these are undoubtedly the Russian people. Magog, Mesech and Tubal were situated between the Black and Caspian seas (Southern Russia) and Rosh is Northern Russia. Modern names that descend from them are:
ROSH = Russia,
Meshech = Moscow,
Tubal = Tobolsk.

The uttermost parts of the north (v6) removes all doubt.
Then you will come from your place out of the far north (38:15);
I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel (39:2). From Israel's standpoint, the far north can only be Russia (Moscow is exactly due north of Jerusalem). So, Russia must be a major power in the end-times, to lead all these nations (this also has only become true since the 20th century).

So Russia will lead a confederacy of nations against Israel.
PERSIA = IRAN (who until the Islamic revolution was pro-Israel and pro-western). Russia needs Iran to go through to reach Israel.
CUSH = ETHIOPIA and possibly other African states (until recently pro-Israel under King Selassie but not now).
PUT = LIBYA or SOMALIA which are also pro-Soviet and anti-Israel.
GOMER = Eastern Europe.
TOGARMAH = ARMENIA (already part of Russia).
So political conditions are lining up for a Russian invasion of Israel.

WHERE ?
Verses 7-12 describe massive army on the mountains of Israel. This is a great prophecy of the regathering of Israel during the last century. (It is in unbelief because only after this battle do many in the nation turn to the Lord). So again, present conditions are lining up for the fulfilment of this prophecy, with Israel established in the land, and Russia an anti-semitic super-power to the North.

Prepare yourself (Russia) and be ready, you and all your armies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them. After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you.

Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates (Israel is known for her Kibbutzim = unwalled villages) to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.
Israel will dwell safely at this time (v8,11), perhaps because of a peace treaty. Or it could indicate that she is secure because she has a good military and is trusting in American help.

WHY? It is for SPOIL (Oil?) (v10-12). In Russia's current economic plight, this makes sense. Expansion of Russian Communism would have been the motive before 1990 but the Bible does not give 'power' as the motive. When a nation is economically on its knees, it is easily tempted to solve the problem by invasion. By mobilising an international force against an unpopular Israel (perhaps pretending to be an occupying force as a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), Russia will think she can get away with it. By getting a foothold in the Middle-East, Russia would have access to much wealth.

The protesters can certainly see what is really going on: SHEBA and DEDAN (Arabia), the merchants of TARSHISH (U.K), and all their young lions (U.S.A, Australia, the Commonwealth, Canada, perhaps other Western democracies also; these nations are currently allied and would oppose an invasion of Israel by Russia) will say to you, Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to

take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder? (v13). Israel's sin now is that she is trusting the U.S.A rather than God to defend her, but in this crisis, none of these act to rescue her. All that these nations do is to launch a mild protest.

God's Reason and Purpose (v14-16a) is to be sanctified in the eyes of the nations by the miraculous way He will save Israel. He will also show Himself strong for Israel, so that they will trust Him. The invasion initially seems successful. Israel is overwhelmed with none to help, so now only God can save them.
Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day when My people Israel dwell safely, will you not know it? Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am sanctified in you, O Gog, before their eyes.

WHAT and HOW ? (v17-23).

WHAT does God do? He judges and destroys the army (v17,18):
Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you he of whom I have spoken in former days by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years in those days that I would bring you against them? And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel, says the Lord GOD, that My fury will show in My face.

HOW? By an EARTHQUAKE (v19,20):
For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.

By CIVIL WAR (v21): I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains, says the Lord GOD. Every man's sword will be against his brother.

By PESTILENCE, BLOOD, FLOOD, HAILSTONES, FIRE and BRIMSTONE (v22):
And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

God does it Himself as a sign to the nations fulfilling His purpose (v23): Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.

Ezekiel 39 tells the story again with more details: Son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD:
Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel (v1,2).
The whole army is destroyed. They fall on the mountains which extend the length of the country.
Only after 1967 have the mountains been under Israel's control. Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken," says the Lord GOD (v3-5).

The land of Russia is devastated also: I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coast lands. Then they shall know that I am the LORD (v6).

The result will be revival in Israel and the nations (v7,8): So I will make My holy Name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Surely it is coming, and it shall be done, says the Lord GOD. This is the day of which I have spoken.

Seven years are needed to dismantle the equipment (v9,10):
Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for 7 years. They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them.

Seven months are take burying the dead (v11-16): It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travellers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified," says the Lord GOD. They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. The search party will pass through the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog. The name of the city will also be Hamonah. Thus they shall cleanse the land.
This indicates massive casualties. Some see in these special procedures evidence of precautions because of the fallout from chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.

WHEN does Ezekiel 38,39 happen?
1. At Mid-Tribulation?
This view identifies the attack as from the 'King of North' = 'Syria' in Daniel 11:40. But there is no Divine intervention mentioned that destroys this army.

2. At Armageddon, at the end of the Tribulation?
The WHO? is wrong - Armageddon is an invasion of all nations from all directions.
The WHY? is wrong. The purpose of Armageddon is not spoil.
The HOW? is wrong. The means of destruction is different. At Armageddon the Lord destroys the invaders by His

personal Return.

3. After the Millennium? (Revelation 20:7-9)
Some suggest this because Gog and Magog are mentioned but these could be general words for the leaders and their people. Nothing else matches up. The WHO?, WHY? and HOW? are all wrong.

When we consider the seven years clear-up, there is only one possibility. All the above are wrong because the clear-up would extend into the Millennium or into the Eternal State. So it must be at least seven years before the Return of Christ. Thus it is at the start of, or more likely, before the Tribulation.

A POSSIBLE SCENARIO:
Russia invades Israel. God sends a great earthquake (Ezekiel 38:19) which destroys the Dome of the Rock (presently occupying the site of the Temple). With Russia destroyed there is a power-vacuum for Rome (Europe) and the antichrist to fill. The Middle-East Arabs no longer have military support from Russia. With a new found confidence in God, Israel feels able to rebuild the Temple possibly with support from Rome (and the covenant with antichrist).

Another prophecy that might be fulfilled before the Tribulation are the destruction of Damascus (Isaiah 17:1-3) although this is more likely to happen in the Tribulation. Psalm 83 describes a conspiracy of nations against Israel, which resonates with the present time. The nations mentioned (Jordan, Syria, the Palestinians, Iraq, Lebanon) are all united in their opposition to Israel.

* The Rebuilding of the Temple (the Third Temple).
As stated above a third Temple must be built on the Temple site - probably where the Dome of the Rock is now. This has only been possible since 1967. The Golden Dome was built over an ancient altar (where Abraham offered up Isaac). It is the highest point of Mount Moriah and was called 'the Foundation Stone' because the Holy of Holies was built upon it. Markings in the rock confirm this, including a rectangular depression in the middle, exactly the right size for the Ark of the Covenant to stand in.

Orthodox Jews are preparing for this now and at the Temple Institute all the necessary implements are being made, including a solid gold Menorah which has just been completed. A Red Heifer Cow has been bred which was a last remaining problem, for its ashes are needed for purification. Only Levites can minister in the Temple and only this Tribe has kept its identity through their names (Levy, Cohen). The Temple could be built before the Tribulation or right at the start of the Tribulation (perhaps made possible by the treaty with antichrist). It must be functioning by the middle of the Tribulation.

Although Israel captured the site in 1967, she decided to allow its daily running to be kept in the hands of the Muslim religious authorities because it was functioning as a Mosque (and is the 3rd holiest site to Islam). In the present political situation, it is unthinkable to rebuild the Temple because it would start a war with the Arab-Muslim nations. Something like a war would be needed to change the political landscape and diminish this threat. Perhaps an earthquake would destroy the Mosque that dominates the Temple site (the site is vulnerable to earthquakes). We suggest a possible scenario shortly.

Scriptures which show that the Temple must be rebuilt for the Tribulation:
1) Daniel 9:27: Then he (antichrist) shall confirm a covenant (a treaty) with many (majority of Israel) for one Week (the seven years Tribulation); but in the middle of the Week, he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering (in the Temple). And on a wing of the Temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.
This is a prophecy about events in the 70th Week of Daniel, otherwise known as the Tribulation. It talks about a rebuilt Jewish Temple that antichrist will desecrate with an idolatrous image (of himself) half way through the seven years.

2) Matthew 24:15 : So when you see standing in the holy place (the Temple) the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
Here, Jesus refers to this prophecy of Daniel (in 9:27) as still awaiting future fulfilment. He did not consider it fulfilled by Antiochus in 167BC. It is interesting to see that Jesus took Daniel's prophecy literally, indicating that He generally understood prophecy literally. He clearly expected a future literal fulfilment that would serve as a clear sign for that generation. Therefore the 70th Week of Daniel was yet future in AD33. Today this abomination has still not happened and so the prophecy awaits fulfilment in the future Tribulation, by which time the Temple must be rebuilt. Those who reckon the prophecy to be fulfilled in AD70 violate the literal fulfilment of prophecy. And in any case Jesus said that this would happen after the Gospel has been preached to all nations (Matt24:14).

3) 2Thessalonians 2:3,4: Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that Day (the Tribulation) will not come until the departure (Rapture) occurs and the man of lawlessness (antichrist) is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.
This speaks of the same event as the previous prophecies half-way through the Tribulation.

4) Revelation 11:1-2: I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, Go and measure the Temple of God and the altar, and count the worshippers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. So there is a Temple for Jewish worship in the Tribulation. It seems likely that this Temple is an important aspect of the covenant that Israel makes with antichrist (perhaps he guarantees them the right to rebuild their Temple and/or the right to worship there). But the Outer Court (the Temple Mount generally) will be under Gentile (UN?) control.

Now this worship is stopped at Mid-Tribulation by the antichrist, who turns it into a centre for his worship in the Great Tribulation, but it will also be the base for the ministry of the two witnesses at this time, for they operate under Divine protection: They will trample on the holy city for 42 months (the Great Tribulation). And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth (prophesied in Zechariah 4).

We cannot be sure if the Temple is built before the Tribulation or soon after the Tribulation begins. In any case, with modern technology a basic structure and altar can be set up very quickly. This rebuilt Temple will only last a short time because it will be replaced by a greater Temple at the Lord's return. It is desecrated by antichrist after three and a half years. Some think that this Temple is not God's will; however, it is necessary as part of God's plan for spiritually restoring Israel to prepare them for Christ's Return (this is another reason for the spiritual warfare over the Temple-Mount because satan does not want this Temple built). It will help remind Israel of the importance of the sacrificial system. Since losing the Temple sacrifices, orthodox Judaism is about earning righteousness with God by keeping the law. It has developed a religious system that is independent of sacrifice. It has forgotten the fallenness of man and the essential need for redemption by blood. Thus the 2 Witnesses (under Divine protection) will operate at the Temple Altar, which will be visited by all of Israel, and in the sight of the sacrifices, they will witness to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, made once for all, for our forgiveness. Thus they will evangelise Israel and bring many to faith. They will tell the new believers to flee when the Temple is desecrated by antichrist. Thus the Temple ministry by the two witnesses, will help prepare the believing remnant of Israel. We know that their ministry will be at the Temple because it is given as the setting in Revelation 11:1,2 and Zechariah 4.

The Temple Mount is the most important and hotly-contested piece of real-estate in the world and there is great spiritual warfare being waged over its possession. Jerusalem and the Temple Mount is (and will continue to be) at the heart of the Middle-East conflict. This is because God has chosen it as the place of His throne in the past and for the future Messianic Kingdom. Here God put His glory and from here, even from the Holy of Holies, the Jewish Messiah (Jesus) will reign upon His throne of glory during the Millennium (Ezek43:7). Thus the Ark of the Covenant (the previous earthly throne and footstool) will be replaced by Jesus Himself enthroned in glory upon the throne of David in the Temple (Jer3:16,17). Therefore the devil fights Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount. This is why the antichrist comes to Jerusalem to set up his throne in the Temple (the place of God's Throne) proclaiming himself as God and making it a place of worship to him (2Thess2:4). In this way he aims to replace the Lord by setting up an evil counterfeit (copy) of the Messianic Kingdom.

*The Rapture is the final event before the Tribulation begins. God has ordained the Rapture to be imminent (it can happen at any time), so that Christians must always stay ready. Therefore, as we look at the political situation in the Tribulation and deduce the events that must take place in the time leading up to it, we must realise that they could also happen soon after the Rapture, in the early part of the Tribulation. Thus, we cannot be sure whether these things will develop before the Tribulation or soon after the start of the Tribulation. (Although some believe there may be an interval of time between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation for some of these events to occur, we saw in Part 1, that the words of Jesus were clear that the Tribulation starts immediately after the Rapture). Therefore God has deliberately left us with this uncertainty so that we stay ready. Obviously some of these events have now already happened (like the rebirth of Israel), while others still remain (like the rebuilding of the Temple). God has protected imminency by ensuring that at whatever moment of Church-history that we are in, our knowledge is limited in such a way that as far as we know the rapture could happen at any moment. As time goes on and history unfolds, our knowledge (of prophecy and its fulfillment) increases, but it is always limited in such a way that the rapture could happen at any moment. To those who think they know better, Jesus says: the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him (Matthew 24:44,50). Jesus is deliberately ruling out the possibility of us saying that there is a certain time in which He can't return. The very time we think we are sure He won't come, is the time He says He will come! Whatever theory we may have for why Jesus can't return yet is invalidated by this verse. He is keeping us in deliberate suspense!

However with our present knowledge of prophecy and world-events, we can clearly discern that we live in a special time marked out by God as the time just before the Tribulation, and the more we see world-events line up with prophecy, the more reason we have to believe the Rapture is very soon!